

The 7 Phases of
Aboriginal History

The 5 Stages of Dying

Dreaming	Denial and
Invasion	Isolation
Genocide	Anger
Protection	Bargaining
Assimilation	Depression
Self Determination	Acceptance
Reconciliation	

We cry together,
we laugh together,
and we tell our stories

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The stages of
of
BY WESLEY ENOCH AND DEBORAH MAILMAN



The
7
stages
of
Grieving

BY WESLEY ENOCH AND DEBORAH MAILMAN

PLAYLAB press

3rd Edition - Revised

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*To our parents' parents
the pain, the sorrow
To our children's children
the glad tomorrow*

In memory of
OODGEROO

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JAGERA LAND
by
Neville Bonner

**Address to the National Indigenous Writers
and Playwrights Conference**

As a Jagera elder from this Jagera country, which encompasses the city of Brisbane, I greet you. I greet you as the recognised elder statesman of the Aboriginal race. I welcome you to this first National Indigenous Writers and Playwrights conference and workshop. For the purpose of setting the scene, so-to-speak, of this short address I quote a non-Indigenous writer. Forgive me please.

John Harris, in the Introduction to his book *One Blood* writes, 'Aboriginal people inhabited this unique and awesome Land for a very long time. No one knows exactly how long'. Still quoting, 'When Moses led the people of Israel into the wilderness, this rich continent was their home, By the time the Anglo-Saxon ancestors of the English invaded Britain, Aboriginal people had spread throughout virtually every part of what we now call Australia'. Unquote.

'I knew that', say each and every one of you and yes you do. I find, however, to state the figure 50,000 or 60,000 years or whatever so often gets scrambled in the absorption process of the non-Indigenous mind, but a Moses timeframe I propose is readily acceptable.

So, having set the timeframe allow me to maintain that, ere Moses led his enslaved people from Egypt, we the Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders of Australia were creative writers, playwrights, tellers of stories. There would have been writings for women, for men, for children, tales of history, from Dreamtime, stories of courage, tragedy and great humour. No computers, electric typewriters, no parchment, no slate, no paper etc. Earth, our absolute everything, was the medium. Sand, bark, cave walls also served. No, it wasn't the script as we know it today but it was a form of writing. Down through the misty ages it all came — communication, education and entertainment. We have been informed that our ancestors were the world's first artists, first fishermen and women. Then, were those

same ancestors the world's first writers, song writers, playwrights and storytellers?

So there we were — well, our forebears — happily owners of this vast landmass, and the brothers and sisters of the Torres Straits firmly entrenched on their magnificent islands. Our Aboriginal ancestors dwelling on the mainland, from lush seaboard through arid desert, were totally unaware that their Land had been 'discovered'. Down through those same misty ages I mentioned before, saw absolutely no need for uniformity of warfare and, I stress, even if they had, the same awesome annihilation would have occurred. What odds? Spears, fighting sticks, fighting boomerangs and lumps of white ant nest versus guns from mounted men. 1788, that woeful, woeful year. The arrival of the first boat people. The happy lot of our forebears and thus ourselves was to drastically change forever. I quote from the work of an Indigenous poet Cec Fisher. My mate.

Memories and the Pain

You came ashore
Pale, like spirit people
Took our Land
Forest, rivers, hills and plain
Gave us Christianity
Changed our future
Left us with memories and the pain

You killed our ancestors
Or imprisoned them
Our mother Earth you plundered for your gain
From her breast rich mineral ores you extracted
Helplessly we watched
Left with memories and the pain
Regardless of the policies
Reconciliation and the rest
Thoughts of our Aboriginality will always remain
Time will never diminish the black deeds of history
We will carry forever the memories and the pain.

I shall repeat the last line of that stanza —

We will carry forever the memories and the pain.

Those termed so quaintly in Australian history as the 'first fleet', comprising Governor Phillip, his staff, unfortunate convicts and a company of soldiers, landed at Botany Bay, their task to establish a penal colony. Since the vast Land was considered unoccupied — Terra Nullius — who cared about the mere 600,000 ignorant savages? He, Governor Phillip, took possession in the name of the English crown. Subsequent boat people arrived, more convicts, more soldiers, followed in due course by a horde gently termed 'Settlers'.

In time, these same 'settlers' expanded from the settled coast areas, driving sheep and cattle in the hinterland of what was our continent. The destruction of Aboriginal hunting ranges began. The insidious toll taken on our coastal Aborigine ancestors, now spread wider and wider. The same deathly toll mushroomed like a white foggy cloud over the Torres Strait Islands. Both Indigenous populations were drastically reduced by the year 1900.

With the expansion of the non-Indigene and the annihilation of vast numbers of our forebears, I submit there accompanied a subtle change in our writings. Approximately one third of our people lived reasonably close to that time prior to the invasion, so writings remained in the red dust of Earth, sand and bark.

[I digress here for a moment and ponder just how much exchange you'll give to this portion of my address during the workshop throughout the week — was it or was it not writing on the Earth?]

A portion of the remainder with great tenacity and courage began to know the mediums and methods of the conquerors, to defeat them, join them, in fact surpass them and Oh! This you have. You, the descendants of the abused, dispossessed Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders, have excelled in your language translation, storytelling, the short story writing, your biographies, your fiction writing, your poems, your plays, the journalism, film and video writing, women's writing, writing for children, academic works, song writing, magazine articles, reviews, comics ...

You have covered the entire spectrum. From the heart of this elderly, elder of Jagera country ... Congratulations! But more so, the spirits of all those who now reside in the 'Golden Corroboree Ground' must surely be enveloping you with their pride and joy.

Again I welcome, I welcome all participants from throughout the nation to this my Jagera country. Our Jagera sky smiles upon you, Jagera sun enfolds you in her warmth, the rocks, hills, trees and mountains of Jagera country greet you. The rivers of Jagera murmur to me their joy that you are here, our Jagera breeze embraces you. Jagera Earth, Earth — our everything — exclaims, 'I am honoured you walk upon me, walk, walk sturdily and surely, you cannot harm me. For I have succoured my Jagera children for 60,000 years'.

It gives me great pleasure to declare open the First National Indigenous Writers and Playwrights Conference and Workshop. Thank you.

NEVILLE BONNER, A.O., D.Uni. (Griffith)

[This was the Opening Address at the National Indigenous Writers and Playwrights Conference and Workshop held at Bardon, Brisbane, on 29 April 1996]

WHY DO WE APPLAUD?

Theatres, actors, critics and the public are interlocked in a machine that creaks, but never stops. There is always a new season in hand and we are too busy to ask the only vital question which measures the whole structure — Why theatre at all?

What for? Is it an anachronism? A superannuated oddity, surviving like an old monument or quaint custom? Why do we applaud, and what? Has the stage a real place in our lives? What function could it have? What could it serve? What could it explore?

What are it's special properties?

Peter Brook, *The Empty Space*, 1968
(Chapter: 'Deadly Theatre')

In 1968 Peter Brook was questioning the role of theatre, its history and its custom. About the same time many Australians were coming to appreciate that Indigenous people of Australia were still alive and, despite all attempts to 'soothe the dying pillow', showed no signs of disappearing. In fact, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population of this country has increased not only through improvements in life expectancy and a drop in child mortality but, most importantly, as a result of people culturally returning to family and place and reclaiming their Indigenous ancestry.

1968 was also the year Kevin Gilbert wrote *The Cherry Pickers* (noted as the first written Aboriginal play). Just when Peter Brook is questioning the position of theatre, Kevin Gilbert is embracing its role to tell his story.

The greatest misconception held by White Australia and indeed international audiences is that Aboriginal culture is a museum piece, a remnant of a world long gone. This romantic picture pays little justice to our instinct for survival and ability to interact with the contemporary world. Murri culture, it was said to me, is a way of explaining the world around us. The stories of Land, the imitation of animals, spirits and the rivers, mountains and trees are testimony to an inherent connection with place and the need for everything to have a place — a story — in the greater fabric of song. When the world was created everything had a story; all the

stories that were ever going to be told were created at that time. There is a completeness. Individuals in the clan would hand down stories, dances, song, ritual within a tightly organised and monitored system of kinship and genetic engineering with very little deviation. But the world is a changing place and the allowance for interpretation within an oral tradition is great, creating new spins to age old stories. Individuals could be visited (in their dreams, in ceremony or domestic duty) by inspiration to explain a new occurrence in the world explaining why, in some communities, there are stories explaining the coming of money, HIV/AIDS, the Toyota, the horse (yarraman) and the bombers in WW II. Murri culture is a dynamic and changing entity. As the world around us changes so too does the speed at which we must tell new stories — giving meaning to the world.

The tension between traditional and contemporary lifestyles/cultures is an integral part of Kooemba Jdarra's ongoing analytical role. The traditional structures of integrating all artforms and narrative influenced design, music, movement, song and story are evident in **THE 7 STAGES OF GRIEVING**. In traditional Murri cultures the interaction and integration of artforms is common place — the story has many ways of being told — the dance, the painting, the song, the rhythm and music all spring from a common story. There is no need to compartmentalise. The 'theatre' of ritual and play is made of these relationships between artforms. In the same way, the arts reflect and tell direct stories of genealogy, history, geography, law, social mores, etc., thus playing a political role in the continuity of the clan. **THE 7 STAGES OF GRIEVING** is about politicising the content and the exploration in form from a traditional to contemporary Murri viewpoint. This exploration is part of the continuity of Indigenous cultures and is important to the development of a modern uniquely Australian voice. The implications are exciting and broad ranging.

This exploration of contemporary and traditional is not new in Indigenous dramatic writing. The existing cannon of Australian playwrighting includes the works of Jimmy Chi (*Bran Nue Dae*), Jack Davis (*The Dreamers, No Sugar, Kullark*), Robert Merritt (*The Cake Man*), Eva Johnson (*Murras*), Owen Love (*No Shame*), Bob Maza (*The Keepers*), Sally Morgan (*Sistergirl*), Richard Walley (*Coordahs*) and many more who engage with the cultural continuum of Indigenous Australia. In the same way that there is no homogeneous Aboriginal nation (accepting the fact that we are a collection of peoples of this continent but with a diversity of languages, cultural practices and geographies), neither is there a generic Aboriginal experience to write of. The specificity of community experience

has been manifest by a proliferation of biographic and auto-biographic writing over the past few decades. The focus on the particulars of political struggles, historic events and / or the personal have helped develop an Indigenous style based on content. Historically, Indigenous writers have focused on appropriating the western forms of theatre to create the drama, incorporating the elements of dance, advanced metaphor and use of language to highlight the writing's Aboriginality. An over-reliance on character and the denial of abstraction has often created a situation where the writing is perceived as unsophisticated and / or primarily issue-based, outside of artistic scrutiny. **THE 7 STAGES OF GRIEVING** wishes to challenge this history.

THE 7 STAGES OF GRIEVING comes from a paralleling of the *5 Stages of Dying* by Elizabeth Kubler-Ross and the *7 Phases of Aboriginal History*. It seemed that there were similarities and this began an exploration into the personal and political history of Indigenous Australia as an expression of our grieving. The performance follows the experiences of an Indigenous 'Everywoman', chronicling the grief present in her life and the means of expressing it. Though the stories acknowledge real events, family histories and personal experiences of the collaborators, **THE 7 STAGES OF GRIEVING** is ultimately a work of 'faction' — a mixture of fact and fiction. As our lives and histories reflect the political changes and policies of the past 207 years (every Murri has a family story of being taken away, or forced denial of language, or strict protectionist practices) so it can be said that our personal histories are indeed the history of our political relationship to Migrant Australia — one of grief, misunderstanding and injustice.

This performance draws upon both 'traditional' and 'contemporary' arts and cultural practice. The integration of artforms, the use of storytelling techniques, new song and dance and the cultural issues surrounding mourning are brought together with projection technologies, contemporary performance art and modern theatrics to explore a form of cultural hybridity. **THE 7 STAGES OF GRIEVING** has been based on the concept of drawing influence from our heritage as Murri artists and the current artistic milieu, with all it has to offer this culturally specific exploration of our voice.

THE 7 STAGES OF GRIEVING has been developed for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander audiences, acknowledging a sense of recognition and shared history.

We cry together, we laugh together and we tell our stories.

In the face of such an overpowering grief — which is our history — we can still laugh and survive. This is surely a sign of our resilience and strength of community. **THE 7 STAGES OF GRIEVING** is a celebration of our survival, an invitation to grieve publicly, a time to exorcise our pain. **THE 7 STAGES OF GRIEVING** is one story from many, a universal theme told through the personal experiences of one character.

Perhaps Peter Brook was questioning the role of theatre because he could not see it giving meaning to the world around him. It is interesting to see that Peter Brook is so fixated by stories and cultures other than his own that he 'appropriates' meaning from culturally based narratives originating in Africa, India and the Middle East. Kevin Gilbert, on the other hand, saw that he needed to celebrate, explore and educate about an Aboriginal perspective, documenting the clash of traditional and contemporary survival techniques.

Isn't this the reason why Theatre exists?

WESLEY ENOCH
Artistic Director
Kooemba Jdarra



A STORY OF ONE'S OWN

There is no part of my personal record that is not at the same time the record of a community, a society, a nation, an age.

James Hillman, psychologist.

In recent years there has been a proliferation of autobiographical works. They range from the creation of myth to family portraits but all share one thing in common — the basic human need to give voice to stories which communicate something of value or something one has experienced or learned.

One reason for the emergence of these works in Australia is that the stories are firmly planted in familiar territory. They are local stories about recognisable events or things. As American choreographer, Louise Steinman, states in her book *The Knowing Body*, '... without a story of your own you have not got a nation or a culture or a civilisation or even a life of your own'.

The most well known of these autobiographical works is William Yang's *Sadness* which has enjoyed national acclaim and is now touring overseas to similar success. Although Yang deals with a very personal journey, he understands the power of storytelling as a means of giving shape to his life and of connecting that life to that of his culture's stories and his ancestors' stories.

In this, **THE 7 STAGES OF GRIEVING** is no exception and is among a number of autobiographical works to emerge from Queensland. Others include *The Secret Fire* by Maree Cunnington with music and lyrics by Ralph Tyrrell, *A Strong Brown God* by Steven Lang, and *Chinese Take Away* by Anna Yen which is currently under development. (The reason for mentioning these works in particular is because I was involved — am involved — in their development and can compare their process with that of **7 STAGES**). All these works underwent a similar process but in the case of **7 STAGES** some additional conditions shaped its development.

When Kooemba Jdarra approached me to work as dramaturg on the project, it was on the tacit understanding that, in the context of aboriginal

writing, all work is new work, as there is a limited repertoire of extant scripts. Thus the company is faced with an urgency to create work which reflects contemporary Indigenous issues and contributes to new dreaming.

Another condition implicit in any work undertaken by the company is Kooemba Jdarra's commitment to produce work by Indigenous artists for an Indigenous audience. (The definition of *Indigenous* here means Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.) The question is, of course, why should this make a difference to the development of new work?

Firstly, I will address the *similarity* that the writing process shared with other autobiographical works.

When developing new work, I believe the most important job of the dramaturg is to assist the writers in making sense of their collection of material, whether it be memories, anecdotes, letters, photographs, graphics, songs, poems, historical references, journal entries, or a half written script. In this, it is my aim to uncover the 'internal logic' of what appears to be a set of random ideas without destroying the distinctive nature of the writer or the sensuality of their personal experience.

To prevent this exploration becoming simply self-indulgent or therapeutic, I see a major responsibility of the dramaturg is to ensure the writer not only makes a distinction between the personal and the public, but to insist they actively search out the connection. Or, as Steinman so eloquently puts it, 'The function of the storyteller in this sense is to make his or her experience the experience of those who listen or watch'.

The reasoning behind this is that once these stories are brought into the public domain, it is no longer the writer talking about her/his life but a character taking the audience on a journey which resembles that of the writer's life. Therefore, incidents, other characters or visual representations take on a different meaning to what they did in real life. They have to be lifted out of their chronological place in time and positioned in the context of the themes being explored in order for the experiences to become transpersonal.

In the case of **THE 7 STAGES OF GRIEVING**, the challenge of removing it from the personal and exploring broader issues currently impacting the Indigenous community, led to some interesting developments. Through a series of exercises, the theme of grieving evolved into one of reconciliation,

which then formed a dramatic question — To reconcile or not to reconcile? Or, another way of putting it — How do people reconcile while they are still grieving?

And yet another more theatrical way of approaching this dramatic question was coined in the following way — How do we make the ice (around our hearts) melt?

Another challenge facing any artistic team when developing work based on 'real life' events is the ability to reproduce the spontaneity with which these events occurred. No easy task! Because more often than not the audience already knows the outcome of this particular story or has some preconceived expectation. In **THE 7 STAGES OF GRIEVING**, this was dealt with by employing several startling theatrical devices in an attempt to have familiar issues of inculturation, assimilation and discrimination viewed in new ways. How successful we were in doing this was put to the test once the production had its premiere in Brisbane in September 1995 .

... Mailman brilliantly juggles the roles of storyteller, political orator and actor ... The play does not seek to preach or invoke a feeling of guilt. Rather, it asks for a sympathetic ear, an attempt on the part of the white viewer to understand the experiences of Aborigines.

Marcus Priest, *The Courier Mail*, 18 September 1995.

This brings me to the *difference* that this process underwent.

Although it is essential writers search out the connection between the personal and the public, it doesn't mean the work is safe in the civic arena. Racism runs deep. It is inherent, ingrained and institutionalised. Even the most cautious of us trip up on close inspection. I am not talking about the kind of 'abo-bashing' racism endemic in our society but the more insidious form which prevents a piece of work being determined on its artistic merit. Because unquestionably, when it comes down to it, work produced by this company will be judged by the dominant paradigm.

To maintain the professional similarity of this process with the other process I had been involved with, I had to confront my inherent racism. This was done between myself and the writers, Wesley and Deborah, with a great deal of heated debate and humour. But one thing which was made very clear to me was that, inevitably, I was working from my own cultural bias. And I had no doubt the external evaluation would fall into the same trap.

For example, Marcus Priest is not a theatre critic, he is the Indigenous Affairs writer. It is clear the material was already getting 'special treatment' — the kind that is spoken of in the play.

In her review, Sue Gough states:

Seven Stages (*sic*) leaves me with ambivalent feelings and vexed questions: Where is the line between catharsis which allows one to move on ... ? Where are we in the impasse between the vital need to be heard and acknowledged and the power wielded in a culture of complaint? ... Are there solutions somewhere beyond blame and guilt, complaint and backlash?

The Bulletin, October 1995.

These remarks give rise to some very serious concerns because they place issues facing Indigenous people today in the context of a 'culture of complaint'. My understanding of this term is that it is used to describe privileged people who have access to resources such as law, culture, education, health services and financial security, yet still find time to complain about their lot. But of greater concern is the fact the reviewer apparently missed the point that, while the white community would be looking for answers to the dilemma, the black community was giving shape to their grief.

While appraising the script, we were always conscious of those stories which could potentially divide a culturally mixed audience. However, there was never an attempt to temper the dramatic effect of certain stories for a non-Indigenous audience. Drawing from personal experiences and incidents, such as the death in custody of Daniel Vocke, the subsequent march on Roma Street, the recent death of prominent aboriginal elders, and the on-going daily discrimination of Indigenous peoples in this country, the play speaks to its community, locally and nationally, in an attempt to create a *story of one's own*.

With regard to the development of new writing and especially young writing, I maintain the writer has total freedom in the choice of content in order to create a story of one's own. The challenge for the dramaturg in this situation is to find the balance between the emerging new voice and that of the viability of a potential production. It is an exciting tension and one that requires a great deal of trust on the part of the writer(s) and the dramaturg, and the broader community who eventually gets to see

and evaluate the work. But if we, in the arts industry, are serious about developing new work, it is a trust worth investing in.

THE 7 STAGES OF GRIEVING is a powerful piece of writing. In cultural and artistic terms, the significance of this must not be overlooked. With the publication of the script, we now have an early record of two new exciting writers and their impressive collaboration. It also offers readers an opportunity to savour moments from a very fine production.

HILARY BEATON 1996.

(Parts of this article appeared in ARTIST AS AUTHOR, an essay commissioned by Joseph O'Connor for ExperiMetro's season of autobiographical works.)

A CULTURAL HISTORY OF AUSTRALIA

Aboriginal occupation of this land goes back at least 60,000 years. Torres Strait Islanders are said to have occupied their islands for 10,000 years. This time line, beginning 120,000 years before the present (BP), the present being 1993, shows some of the events in the history of Indigenous Australia.

55,000 - 60,000 BP: At a site in Arnhem Land in the Northern Territory, a rock shelter was used by people about 60,000 years ago. They used stone tools and red ochre probably to prepare pigments for rock painting or body decoration.

45,000 BP: Rock engravings made in South Australia – the earliest dated petroglyphs.

15,000 - 24,000 BP: Grooved designs on cave walls, early evidence of the close relationship in Aboriginal society of art and working life.

9,000 - 7,000 BP: Earliest visible evidence of Aboriginal belief connected with the Rainbow Serpent. This becomes the longest continuing religious belief in the world.

406 BP: (1588 AD) – Trade between Aborigines and the Macassans

224 BP: (1770 AD) – Lieutenant James Cook claims to take possession of the whole east coast of Australia.

206 BP: (1788 AD) – Captain Phillip raises the Union Jack at Sydney Cove and the invasion begins. The Aboriginal population is more than 750,000. Resistance is immediate.

190 BP: (1804 AD) – Two years after the British flag is raised in Van Diemen's Land (Tasmania) settlers are authorised to shoot Aborigines.

164 BP: (1830 AD) – Governor Arthur gets 5,000 men to line up across Van Diemen's Land and walk the length of the country in an attempt to force Aborigines into the Tasman Peninsula. The plan doesn't work.

160 BP: (1834 AD) – WA Governor Stirling leads 25 mounted police against Aborigines ... A tribe is wiped out in the attack.

159 BP: (1835 AD) – John Batman attempts to make a treaty with Aboriginal people. Blankets and goods are exchanged for 250,000 hectares of land. This treaty is the only one made with the original occupants of the land but is not recognised by colonial authorities.

157 BP: (1837 AD) – In London, a Parliamentary Select Committee reports that genocide is occurring in the Antipodes.

156 BP: (1838 AD) – First Aboriginal Protectorate established for Port Phillip.

146 BP: (1848 AD) – NSW native police troopers are brought to Queensland to kill natives and open up the land for settlement.

126 BP: (1868 AD) – First Aboriginal cricket team left Sydney for England. One hundred and fifty Aboriginal people are killed resisting arrest in the Kimberleys.

118 BP: (1876 AD) – Tasmania's Truganini dies.

100 BP: (1894 AD) – Jandamarra or "Pigeon", an Aboriginal resistance fighter, declares war on white invaders in the west Kimberley. He holds west Kimberley at bay for six years.

86 BP: (1908 AD) – The Invalid and Old Age Pensioner Act provides social security for some but not for Aborigines.

82 BP: (1912 AD) – Maternity allowance is introduced but no allowance is payable to Aboriginal people.

76 BP: (1918 AD) – In the Northern Territory the Aborigines Ordinance forbids mining on Aboriginal Reserve Land.

56 BP: (1938 AD) – Aborigines trucked into Sydney and threatened with starvation unless they play their appointed role in the re-enactment of the events of 26 January 1788.

53 BP: (1941 AD) – The Child Endowment Act is passed but no endowment is to be paid to nomadic or dependent natives.

52 BP: (1942 AD) – Darwin is bombed by the Japanese ... Aboriginal people make a special reconnaissance unit in defence against the Japanese.

45 BP: (1949 AD) – NT Legislative Council passes a bill giving citizenship rights to all NT Aborigines except those in state care. Atomic tests, cynically codenamed Operation Totem, are conducted at Emu, South Australia. A black cloud passes leaving many Aborigines suffering radiation sickness.

29 BP: (1965 AD) – Charles Perkins leads Freedom Ride through western New South Wales.

27 BP: (1967 AD) – A referendum is held in May to change clauses in the Federal Constitution discriminating against Aboriginal people.

23 BP: (1971 AD) – Noonkanbah station workers walk off ... as a protest against the theft of their land.

22 BP: (1972 AD) – The Whitlam Government brings in a policy of self-determination.

18 BP: (1976 AD) – The Aboriginal Land Rights (NT) Act is passed by the Federal Parliament.

17 BP: (1977 AD) – The first Land Claim hearing.

15 BP: (1979 AD) – The Aboriginal Treaty Committee and the National Aboriginal Conference call for a treaty.

11 BP: (1983 AD) – A delegation of 5 Aboriginal people goes to Geneva to attend a UN Commission on Human Rights Working Group on Indigenous Populations.

10 BP: (1984 AD) – A Royal Commission is opened into the British Nuclear Tests.

7 BP: (1987 AD) – NT elections are held and voting becomes compulsory for Aboriginal people.

6 BP: (1988 AD) – The Bicentenary ... Tens of thousands of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people march through the streets of Sydney on 26 January to celebrate their survival during the previous two hundred years.

3 BP: (1991 AD) – The Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody presents its Report and Recommendations to the Federal Government.

2 BP: (1992 AD) – The High Court of Australia rules in the Mabo case that native title exists over particular kinds of land.

1 BP: (1993 AD) – The UN Year of Indigenous Peoples celebrated throughout the world.

[From The Little Red, Yellow & Black (and green and blue and white) Book (1994). Adapted from the Land Rights News Vol.2 No.6, January 1996. Reprinted by kind permission of the Australian Institute for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies.]

1993 Native Title legislation enacted

“Redfern Speech” by Paul Keating, acknowledging past injustices to indigenous people

1995 “Bringing Them Home” Report into the Stolen Generations

1996 Wik Ruling by the High Court

ATSIC Annual budget cut by \$1 billion

2000 Federal Reconciliation Council disbanded

Bridge Walks for Reconciliation

The History of Kooemba Jdarra

Kooemba Jdarra means 'good ground' in the Turrabul language from South East Queensland. Kooemba Jdarra was established in 1993, the International Year of the World's Indigenous Peoples, and since then has presented a number of shows, workshops and community events. Here are just a few:

- **Maakinngs**, written by Jackie Huggins and presented in association with CONTACT Youth Theatre, toured to Europe and regional Queensland communities (July - August 1993).
- **Race Against Racism**, a project working with three schools, a team of artists and a commissioned writer to devise a touring show for schools (February - September 1994).
- The first professional production of **The Cherry Pickers** by Kevin Gilbert, regarded as the first Aboriginal play ever written (November 1994).
- **Landsong**, The Murri opening event for the *World of Music Festival*, involving over 35 Indigenous artists including Archie Roach, Ruby Hunter, Maureen Watson and Neville Bonner (October 1994).
- A creative development stage for **THE 7 STAGES OF GRIEVING** culminating with a workshop showing at *The Shock of the New Festival* at La Boite (October 1994).
- A workshop program at Sir David Langland Correctional Centre in dance, drama and culture (February - June 1995).
- **Changing Time**, a professional touring show for young audiences, in association with Salamanca Theatre Company from Hobart (February - July 1995) and a Queensland schools tour in 1996.
- **Murri Love**, written by Cathie Craigie, was performed as part of *The Fringe Festival*, looking at issues of domestic violence and friendships (May 1995).

- The inaugural season of **THE 7 STAGES OF GRIEVING**, written by Wesley Enoch and Deborah Mailman and presented at the Metro Arts Theatre in 1995.
- **Spirit**, a devised work for young people using dance and story-telling, presented with the Queensland Performing Arts Trust Education Program in 1995.
- 1996 – Kooemba Jdarra toured nationally with **THE 7 STAGES OF GRIEVING**; performed in regional Queensland and Brisbane schools with **Changing Time**; performed **The Little White Dress**, a reworking of **Spirit**, for the *Out of the Box Festival* for children aged 3-8; and presented **The Dreamers** by Jack Davis for *The Brisbane Festival* in September.
- 1997 – **Up the Ladder** by Roger Bennett, **Radiance** by Louis Nowra (co-production with QTC), **Bethel and Maude** by Joann Close & Roxanne McDonald, **Bidenjarreb Pinjarra** (in association with Performing Lines), **Many Tracks** Community Show.
- 1998 – **Black Shorts Regional Touring Program**, **Possession** by Glen Shea, **Jidja** by Jadah Milroy, **Beyond the Gate** by Ray Kelly, **Grace & Piety** by Wesley Enoch (co-production with JUTE).
- 1999 – **Romeo & Juliet** by William Shakespeare (co-production with La Boite Theatre), **Goin' to the Island** by Therese Collie (in association with QPAT).
- 2000 – **Skin Deep** by Dallas Winmar, **Luck of the Draw** by Ned Manning (in association with QPAT), **Binni's Backyard** by Therese Collie and Nadine McDonald (in association with QPAT).
- 2001 – **Piccaninni Dreaming** by Anthony Newcastle, **Goin' to the Island** by Therese Collie (10 Days on the Island Festival), **Seems Like Yesterday** by George Bostock (in association with QPAT).
- 2002 – **Yarnin' Up** by Anthony Newcastle and Mike Dickinson, **Purple Dreams** by Archie Weller, **Piccaninni Dreaming** by Anthony Newcastle.

Kooemba Jdarra Indigenous Performing Arts Board of Management at 1 May 1996

Glenis Charlton (Chair), Lafe Charlton (Treasurer), Deborah Mailman (Secretary), Jennifer Herd, Rhonda Kelly, Roxanne McDonald and Helena Gulash.

Kooemba Jdarra Staff

Artistic Director — Wesley Enoch
 Administrator — Katherine Hoepper
 Administrative Assistant — Gina Taylor
 Workshops and Training Co-ordinator — Susan Hill
 Production Manager — Stephanie Walkem
 Production Assistant — Leaf Bennet

The work of Kooemba Jdarra is made possible through the support of ATSIIC — the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission, the Queensland Government through Arts Queensland, and the Commonwealth Government through the Australia Council, its funding and advisory body.

Kooemba Jdarra appreciates the ongoing support of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community.

The 1996 tour of Kooemba Jdarra's **THE 7 STAGES OF GRIEVING** was made possible by the Federal Government's national performing arts touring program — Playing Australia.

Playing Australia aims to enable major national arts organisations to expand their touring programs, to help venues and locally based organisers to host touring activities, and to encourage presenters of innovative programs to take their work across Australia.



THE 7 STAGES OF GRIEVING

Written by Wesley Enoch and Deborah Mailman
 Performed by Deborah Mailman

Director Wesley Enoch
 Visual Artist... Leah King-Smith
 Original Songs Roxanne McDonald
 Dramaturg Hilary Beaton
 Designer Glenn Francis
 Lighting Designer Matt Scott
 Sound Designer Duncan King-Smith
 Stage Manager Danielle Kellie

First performed at the Metro Arts Theatre on 13 September 1995
 National Tour 1996 with Performing Lines

The 1996 tour of Kooemba Jdarra's **THE 7 STAGES OF GRIEVING** was made possible by the Federal Government's national performing arts touring program — Playing Australia



1995 Production personnel

Back Row (L-R): Katherine Hoepper, Duncan King-Smith, Glenn Francis, Stephanie Walkem, Stephen Armstrong, Hilary Beaton.

Front Row (L-R): Leah King-Smith, Roxanne McDonald, Deborah Mailman, Wesley Enoch

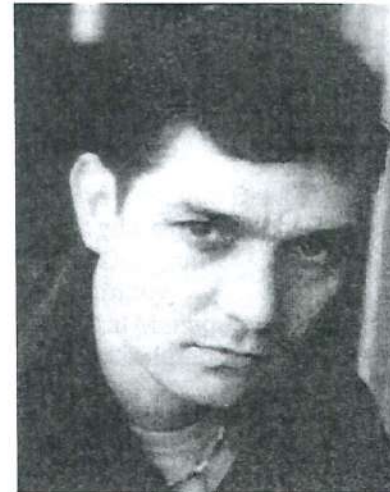
Deborah Mailman



Training: QUT, Academy of the Arts, BA (Acting), 1992. THEATRE: *The Chapel Perilous* (Academy of the Arts) Wirkinowt (Contact Youth Theatre) *Written in Water* (Assistant Director/Contact Youth Theatre) *Vassa Zheleznova* (QUT, Academy of the Arts) *Leisure Expo* (Art Aches Theatre Company) *Gwenda* (Brisbane Theatre Company) *Top Girls* (QUT, Academy of the Arts) *Bumpy Angels* (QUT, Academy of the Arts) *International Comedy Bananza* (Art Aches Theatre Company) *Maakings* (Co-Dir/Contact Youth T./European Tour) *Cagebirds* (Woodward Theatre) *Summer of the Aliens* (Metaluna Theatre Company/QPAT) *One Woman's Song* (Queensland Theatre Company)

The Taming of the Shrew (La Boite T. & Qld Tour) *The Cherry Pickers* (Kooemba Jdarra) *Gigi* (QLD Theatre Company) *Murri Love* (Kooemba Jdarra) *Capricornia* (QUT/QPAT) *Ragnarock* (Danish Theatre/Contact Youth Theatre) *The 7 Stages of Grieving* (Co-Devised with Wesley Enoch/Kooemba Jdarra at Metro Arts/Australian Tour/London International Festival of Theatre/Adelaide Come Out Festival/Festival of The Dreaming/Zurich Festival) *Radiance* (Qld Theatre Company and Tour) *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (Sydney Theatre Company/Festival of The Dreaming) *The Conjurers* (La Boite Theatre) *King Lear* (Bell Shakespeare Co.) *As You Like It* (Company B Belvoir) *The Small Poppies* (Company B Belvoir/Dublin Theatre Festival and Melbourne Festival) *The 7 Stages of Grieving* (Sydney Theatre Company) **TELEVISION:** *Inside Out* (VitalStatistix Docudrama) *A Village Called Chardonnay* (SBS Television) *Playschool Presenter* (ABC Television) *Coloured Inn* (Pilot/ABC Television) *Bondi Banquet* (Robyn Kershaw Productions Pty Ltd) *Secret Life of Us – Series 1* (West Street Productions No 3. Pty Ltd.) *Message Stick Presenter* (ABC TV) *The Secret Lie of Us – Series 2* (West St Productions No. 3 Pty Ltd) **FILM:** *Radiance* (Dir: Rachel Perkins/Eclipse Films) *Dear Claudia, The Third Note* (Catriona McKenzie/AFTRS) *The Monkey's Mask* (Dir: Samantha Lang I Arenafilm Pty Ltd) *Follow the Rabbit-Proof Fence* (Dir: Phillip Noyce I Jabal Films Pty Ltd) **AWARDS** 1995 – Matilda Award Winner for *The 7 Stages Of Grieving* 1997 – Matilda Award Winner – *Radiance*, 1997 – Film Critics Circle of Australia Best Actress Award – *Radiance* 1998 – AFI Best Actress Award – *Radiance*.

Wesley Enoch



Directing – 2002: *The Seven Stages of Grieving* (Sydney Theatre Company) *The Dreamers* (Belvoir St Theatre) *Stolen*, remount at Playbox Theatre 2001: *Stolen* (English tour) *The Cherry Pickers* (Sydney Theatre Company) *Black-ed Up* (Sydney Theatre Company Victorian Tour) 2000: *Stolen* (seasons in Adelaide, Sydney and Tasmania) *Black Medea* (Sydney Theatre Company) *Fountains Beyond* (Queensland Theatre Company) *The Sunshine Club* (Sydney Theatre Company) *Black-ed Up* (Sydney Theatre Company) 1999: *The Sunshine Club* (Queensland Theatre Company) *Stolen* (Playbox Theatre return season and regional tour) *Romeo and Juliet* (Bell Shakespeare Company) *Black-ed Up* (Qld Regional Tour) *ETS/Language Alive!*

Project (Birmingham, UK) 1998: *Stolen* (Playbox Theatre – Melbourne Festival Season) *The 7 Stages of Grieving* (Swiss International Festival of Theatre – Zurich) *Black-ed Up* (QTC Educational Program) *A Life of Grace and Piety* (Just Us Theatre Ensemble and Kooemba Jdarra – Cairns and Brisbane) 1997: *The 7 Stages of Grieving* (Festival of the Dreaming – Sydney Opera House & Kooemba Jdarra Indigenous Performing Arts Company) *The 7 Stages of Grieving* (London International Festival of Theatre Festival Centre, Adelaide) *Up The Ladder* (Festival of the Dreaming Co-Production Kooemba Jdarra/Melbourne Workers Theatre) *Up The Ladder*, (regional Victorian tour) *Radiance* (Queensland Theatre Company/Regional Tour Co-production with Kooemba Jdarra) *Grace* (short film AFC Indigenous Drama Initiative Commission) 1996: *The Dreamers* (Brisbane Festival) *Little White Dress* (Queensland Performing Arts Centre/Out of the Box Festival) *The 7 Stages of Grieving* (National City Tour and Regional WA Tour/ Kooemba Jdarra) 1995: *Changing Time* (Kooemba Jdarra/Co-production with Salamanca Theatre Company, Tasmania) *Murri Love* (Metro Theatre, Brisbane) *The 7 Stages of Grieving* (Metro Arts Theatre/Kooemba Jdarra). **Writing** – 1998/9: *THE SUNSHINE CLUB* (QTC Commission) 1998: *THE MOUTH OF THE RIVER* (ABC Commission) 1997: *GRACE* (short film AFC Indigenous Drama Initiative Commission) *THE 7 STAGES OF GRIEVING* (Co-Writer with Deborah Mailman) *A LIFE OF GRACE AND PIETY* (Just Us Theatre Ensemble, Cairns) 1996: *LITTLE WHITE DRESS* (Out of the Box Festival) **Artistic Posts & Committees (abridged)** – 2000: *RESIDENT DIRECTOR*, Sydney Theatre Company; 1994-1997 *ARTISTIC DIRECTOR* Kooemba Jdarra, 1990-1994 Coordinator, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Projects, Contact Youth Theatre. **Other Work** – 1993 *ABORIGINAL ARTIST IN RESIDENCE*, St Martin's Youth Theatre, *ACTOR One Woman's Song* (Queensland Theatre Company) & *Freedom Ride* (La Boite Theatre.)

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Pre-Recorded Music

Awakening Earth

Cello and harmonic overtone singing. Composed and performed by Sarah Hopkins.

Past Life Melodies

Choir and cello. Commissioned and sung by St Peter's Choral with Sarah Hopkins. Composed by Sarah Hopkins.

Awakening Earth and *Past Life Melodies* are from Sarah Hopkins' latest CD **Reclaiming the Spirit** (New World Productions, CD I Cassette. Cat. No. 777)

Detroit City (Dill - Tillis)

Performed by Charley Pride from **Charley Pride's Greatest** (RCA Cassette).

Didgeridoo music performed by Darren Williams.

Archival recordings of Brisbane Demonstrations by Brendan Greenhill (4ZZZ).

Wakka Wakka Dancers recorded November 1994, Brisbane.

Ocean Sounds with Sarah Hopkins' music recorded by Bill Fontana.

All other environmental recordings by Duncan King-Smith.

Soundtrack mixed at Grevillea Records, Brisbane.

The Sydney Theatre Company production of *The 7 Stages of Grieving* opened on Wednesday, August 21, 2002 in the Studio of the Sydney Opera House with the following cast and crew —

An Aboriginal Woman Deborah Mailman

Director	Wesley Enoch
Set and Costume Design	Ralph Myers
Lighting Designer	Mark Pennington
Sound Designer	Duncan King-Smith
Photography	Leah King-Smith
Technical Manager	Barry Searle
Stage Manager	Chris McKendry

For Sydney Theatre Company —

Artistic Director	Robyn Nevin
General Manager	Rob Brookman
Artistic Associate	Stephen Armstrong
Education Manager	Jacinta Thompson

Board of Directors

James Strong (Chairman), John Atanaskovic, Jillian Broadbent, Ian Darling, Sandra Levy, Michael Magnus, Angie Milliken, Robyn Nevin AM, Anne Schofield, Doug Snedden, Katharine Thomson.

A Note From Director and Co-Author

When Deborah and I first started working on *The 7 Stages of Grieving* it was 1993 and we were attracted to each others work and personal energy. It took two years before the scraps of paper and random discussions took the shape of a workshop performance with a 25 minute version showing at *The Shock of the New Festival* at La Boite in Brisbane. It went on to be workshopped into a full production for the 1995 Warana (now Brisbane) Festival whilst I was Artistic Director of Kooemba Jdarra. Though the work received mixed reviews, we believed that there was something in this collection of stories and images and pursued other festivals and touring. We rewrote and polished, edited and wrote whole new sections. Wendy Blacklock from Performing Lines had picked the show up, along with Christine Best from Salamanca in Tasmania, Rob Brookman who was then in charge of the National Theatre Festival in Canberra, the Nambundah Festival in Sydney and Zane Trow from Next Wave in Melbourne and in 1996 it toured nationally. In 1997 it toured internationally to London and Zurich.

The most valuable gift a piece of new work can have is time and the room for the artists involved to reflect on their intentions, their instincts and how an audience reads the show they've created. Deborah and I have both come a long way from 1993 when we were just talking about this show and our dreams and aspirations for it. Deborah and I haven't worked together since and it seemed fitting to revisit *The 7 Stages of Grieving* which has become the yardstick by which I measure the success or otherwise of each subsequent piece I create. This gift of time has meant we could revise the text and the staging.

Rewrites have taken into account a changed world — the walks over the bridges, the Olympics, and the calls for a treaty and an apology. The fact that people overseas and students in New South Wales study this text comes as a shock, albeit a pleasant one. The fact that people gave us the time to experiment and fail and pursue it further is something I value greatly.

Wesley Enoch

August, 2002.

THE 7 STAGES OF GRIEVING

1 Prologue

A large block of ice is suspended by 7 strong ropes. It is melting, dripping onto a freshly turned grave of red earth. The performance area is covered in a thin layer of black powder framed by a scrape of white. Within the space there are projection surfaces.

Ladies and Gentlemen, we would like to take this opportunity to warn members of the audience that the following performance contains names and visual representations of people recently dead, which may be distressing to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. All care has been taken to acquire the appropriate permission and to show all proper respects. Thank you.



2 Sobbing

The faint sound of someone crying in the dark. The sobbing grows into a wail as the lights reveal an Aboriginal Woman alone with her grief. As her weeping subsides, words are projected up on the screen.

Grief
Grieving
Sorrow
Loss
Death
Pain
Distress
Lament
Mourn
Emptiness
Despair
Lonely
Regret
Misfortune
Guilt
Passion
Love
Absence
Desolate
Nothing
Nothing
I feel ... Nothing

3 Purification

The Woman lights up a wad of eucalypt leaves and watches them burn. She blows out the flame and as the embers smoke she sings a song for the spirits of those that have gone before her and asks permission to tell the story of her grief.

Murraba bullar du

(Spoken-)

Yugila yugila munan gi
Yugila yugila munan gi

(Sung-)

Bullar du
Bullar du
Murraba bullar du

Bullar du
Bullar du
Murraba bullar du

Bullar du
Bullar du
Murraba bullar du

Yugila yugila munan gi
Yugila yugila munan gi



4 Nana's Story

The performing area is flooded with colour. Floral patterns cover the Woman's dress. The story is textured with sounds of family, country music and the call of the Kingfisher.

"The only thing black at a funeral should be the colour of your skin." And so all my young cousins wore bright floral dresses.

My grandmother was a strong god-fearing woman who, at the age of 62, was taken from us, moved on ... passed away.

My family were in mourning for a month. All of us together in five houses ... we numbered close to 50 people.

My grandmother didn't want to go to the hospital because that's where people went to die. Most of her friends had never come back.

She was a woman who couldn't trust doctors, a woman who couldn't speak to teachers or police, wouldn't answer the telephone, gave her tithe to the church and got nervous at the mention of the 'gubberment'.

The whole family came together for meals. Huge barbecues, bowls of salads laid out on makeshift trestles tables, tropical fruits, bread, pasta, rice, no matter what you were having for dinner there was always rice. Stew — rice ... steak and chips — rice ... sandwiches — rice ... hot rice, cold rice, in between rice. Ah, don't. So much steak and sausages and mince and chicken ... stuff we had spent half the day cooking or pots of things other family had brought over.

Nana would tell us of the days when there wasn't enough to feed all the kids. She wouldn't tell us a lot of stories but when she did we all listened, she'd sing to us.

The sound of country music mixing with the clickerclack of knives and forks and then someone would start singing along. Before you knew it, the older generation were in the middle of '*Delta Dawn ...*' and us lot all cringed. Even to this day, I can still sing all the words ... but I wont. There was so much going on — sometimes you didn't notice two people hugging, sobbing in the hallway. Everyone had their time. Sometimes

you felt like crying, and sometimes the joy of being there was enough to forget, even for the briefest moment, the reason.

My sister reckons that she knew about Nana first. In the middle of the night the sound of a bird singing had woken her up. She went to the kitchen, she made a pot of tea, she sat beside the phone and waited. When it finally rang she answered, "I know".

Four hundred people ... four hundred people turned up to the service. They couldn't fit in the church. They just sat in the shade listening from outside but when we got to the grave a song caught on around the gathering, the old aunties, the uncles, until they were all singing. The words were unfamiliar to me. The tune soared above us with the Kingfisher.

The woman reflects on this moment.

Back at the house the boys painted up and danced. And the girls showed a thing or two as well. The neighbours watched from the "safety" of their kitchen windows, one fella came out to water his garden, Gamin like, another had his video camera, and we talked and drank and laughed. The kids got a video. But when it came to sleeping — oh shit! — cushions, mattresses, lounges and back seats in cars. Black fellas as far as the eye could see.

I miss my grandmother. She took so many stories with her to the grave. Stories of her life, our traditions, our heritage, who I am ... gone.

The Woman sings recalling the first few lines of 'Delta Dawn'.

5 Photograph Story

A chair scrapes across a wooden floor, footsteps recede, a clock ticks. Projected are images of an open suitcase filled with family photographs, old and new. The progression of slides brings us closer into the details of the photographs.

In the house of my parents where I grew up, there's a suitcase, which lives under the old stereo in the front room. The room is full of photographs, trophies, pennants, memories of weddings, birthdays, christenings and family visits. A testimony to good times, a constant reminder.

But this suitcase, which resides under the old stereo tightly fastened, which lies flat on the floor comfortably out of reach, safe from inquisitive hands or an accidental glance. In this suitcase lies the photos of those who are dead, the nameless ones and here they lie, passing the time till they can be talked of again. Without a word we remove the photo of my Nana from her commanding position on the wall and quietly slip her beneath the walnut finish. And without a sound push her into the shadow.

Everything has its time ... Everything has its time ...



44



45

6 Story of a Father

The Woman sits on the edge of the grave.

I'm trying to deal with Dad's death. He hasn't died yet, but the time is coming soon when he'll be taken away.

He's 48, in and out of hospital, he knows he needs to rest. But he hasn't stopped fighting since 1967. I know it seems selfish that the thought is on myself rather than Dad, I know, but the time is coming when this won't be a rehearsal anymore.

Sometimes I find myself crying in the dark alone. The pain comes in and I cry and cry until I can't feel anymore. Numbed. Nothing.

But I've got my home ... and I've got my family ... and I'll never have to live through what my Dad lived through.

It's inevitable, death.

The one thing that I find comforting about it is that everyone's got to do it. Phillip Ruddick, Bruce Ruxton, John Laws, Alan Jones, Stan Zemanek Pauline Hanson, David Oldfield, Cheryl Kernot, just for being stupid.

7 Front and Centre

I went to a funeral the other week ... a young fella had died, no family really, by himself ... but in the front row ... front and centre I noticed this old Auntie crying that heavy wailing cry. Now I knew she couldn't have known this fella, he had no family to speak of ... and ... at the end of the service she just slipped out without talking to anyone. It was playing on my mind. I decided to follow her ... see where she went.

She didn't live far from the church, just around the corner in a flat under someone's house.

It didn't phase her when I knocked, she welcomed me straight in.

The first thing I noticed were the 5 cats she had and then the newspapers, piles and piles ... and on the dining table ... at first I thought the table was full of form guides for the horses, pages with bright blue circles but when I got closer I could see they were the pages of death notices. And the things she's circled were today's funerals. I could see she spends her day going from church to church, going to funerals.

She didn't bat an eye lid when I asked her why ...

I might be related, she answered, I never knew my family — maybe I could meet my real family and if not I get to have a good cry, anyway.

The Woman leaves.

8 Family Gallery

A collection of family photos are projected like portraits in a gallery. They are recognisable as images from the suitcase.

9 Black Skin Girl

The Woman dances around, childlike, singing. Letters of the alphabet appear on her dress. At first it is a game but one from which she tires. She attempts to evade the letters by removing her dress. She is left topless with the letter Z on her chest.

Bului yuli mie

Bului yuli mie
Bului yuli mie
Naia gigi warunguldul
Naia gigi warunguldul

(repeat)

10 Invasion Poem

A shaft of light from a half-open door frames the Woman. A chair scrapes across a wooden floor, footsteps recede, a door closes, a clock ticks.

They come in the front door
Smiling
Offering gifts.
I invited them in, they demanded respect.
They sat in my father's seat
And talked to me of things that made no sense.
I nodded. Listened. Gave them my ear
As I was always taught to.

Without warning
They broke from our soft
Whispered conversation.
One took a handful of my hair and led my head to their knee.
Another washed his face in my blood.
Together they chained my feet. My feet.

My children, stolen away to a safe place,
Were wrenched from familiar arms and
Forced to feed upon another tongue.
The protests of my mother's mother cut short.
Silenced by a single wave of a stick.
Told not to speak, not to dance.
Told not to do what we have always done.

I lie painfully sleepless
In a landscape of things I know are sacred.
Watching unsympathetic wanderings.

To wonder is to think.
To wander is to walk.

The Woman retrieves her dress.

11 1788

The date 1788 appears.

"Oi. Hey, you! Don't you be waving back at me! Yeh, you with that hat! You can't park here, eh! You're taking up the whole bloody harbour! Just get in your boat and go. Go on, go on get!"



12 Murri Gets a Dress

Delivered in the style of stand up comedy.

Have you ever been black? You know when you wake up one morning and you're black? Happened to me this morning. I was in the bathroom, looking in the mirror, "Hey, nice hair, beautiful black skin, white shiny teeth ... I'm BLACK!"

You get a lot of attention, special treatment when you're black. I'm in this expensive shop and there's this guy next to me, nice hair, nice tie, nice suit, waving a nice big pump-you-full-of-holes semi-automatic gun in the air and the shop assistants are all looking at me. "Keep an eye on the black one ... eye on the black one."

OK, so I went to try on a dress and the shop assistant escorts me to the 'special' dressing room, the one equipped with video cameras, warning to shop lifters, a security guard, fucken sniffer dog ... 'Get out of it'. Just so I don't put anything I shouldn't on my nice dress, nice hair, beautiful black skin and white shiny teeth ...

Now I'm in this crowded elevator, bathed in perfume, in my nice dress, nice hair, beautiful black skin and white shiny teeth ... 'Hey which way'.

The Woman sniffs the air.

Someone boodgi and they all look at me! Ah, knock off.

Now I go to my deadly Datsun, looking pretty deadly myself, which way, lock my keys in the car. Eh but this Murri too good, she got a coat hanger in her bag! Fiddling around for a good, ooh five seconds and started hearing sirens, look around, policeman on bikes, policeman in cars, policeman jumping out of helicopters and that same fucken sniffer dog. Get out of it. IT'S MY CAR!!

So I'm driving along in my car. Car breaks down. Get out. Started waving people for help. Vrooom!

Imitating a fast car.

Waving for help. Vrooom!
Help. Vrooom!

Finally get home, foot falcon job and I'm still looking deadly in my nice dress, nice hair, beautiful black skin and white shiny teeth. Aunty comes in, "Eh Sisgirl, you bought a new dress, too bad it makes you look fat.

I go to bed thinking "Tomorrow will be a better day", snuggling up to my doona and pillow. Morning comes; I wake up, I go into the bathroom. I look in the mirror. Hey, nice hair, beautiful black skin, white shiny teeth. I'M STILL BLACK! AND DEADLY!

13 Aunt Grace

The Woman pulls the suitcase out of the grave. Placing it before her on the floor, she opens it. She looks up at the audience.

Aunt Grace came back especially for Nana's funeral. I had only known this woman through Nana's collection of photographs. They were never displayed with the other members of our family, they were only brought out on request, when any of the older cousins asked about family history. The pictures always showed the two sisters together. Going to a social or party. Aunt Grace was beautiful, a half head taller than her younger sister, slender and almost inevitably dressed in white, teeth glowing extra white, in the two tone capture of the moment.

My father went to pick up Aunt Grace from the airport and dropped her at an hotel. She wasn't going to stay with the rest of us. That was very clear.

Aunt Grace lives in London. She's lived there for almost 50 years. I had never met her though I'm told I had when I was a baby. No one really talked of her but she seemed to know all about us. Remembering names and quoting our parents' names and guessing ages. Her features well preserved, her skin gone pale for want of sun and though she looked like no one in particular from the family, she fit in to the look of us all. The skinny ankles, the line of her shoulders and that nose.

I never saw her cry the whole time she was with us.

Dad said she was stuck up and wasn't really family. She married this Englishman after WWII. There's a photo of her on a ship waving with this white fella, his arm around her. For some reason she didn't stay, which is strange. My family have always lived here. Nana used to say, "Just when all our men were coming home and we had our share to bury too, she upped and left us. The Black Princess sipping tea with the Queen.

Now I'm a Christian woman and I forgive her but ... No more. No more talking of her."

I drive Aunt Grace out to the cemetery on our way to the airport. She doesn't have much luggage, there is plenty of room in the back seat but no one comes to see her off. I wait in the car while she goes out to the freshly turned soil of Nana's grave. She is there for such a long time, I

think we are going to be late. Finally she comes back to the car, opens the back door and removes her suitcase. She opens it, throwing the contents all over the ground, everything. Dragging the empty suitcase, the lid slapping her legs, she sits at the grave.

The Woman begins to fill the case with red earth from the grave.

Crying, at last, crying.

The Woman collects herself and places the Suitcase on top of the disturbed grave.

14 Mugshot

Delivered in the style of a court report with no hint of emotion.

On 7th November 1993, Daniel Vocke together with Joseph Blair, Damien Bond, Lindsay Fisher, Archie Gray, Glen Gray, Charles Riley, Edward Riley and Daniel Weasel went to Southbank. After an altercation between Vocke and an unknown person, the group left Southbank and travelled to Musgrave Park. Some alcohol was purchased at the Melbourne Hotel and consumed by the group in Musgrave Park.

Whilst the group was in Musgrave Park, Constables Domrow and Harris were patrolling the area surrounding the park. The group came to their attention allegedly because they were abusive and one of them exposed himself.

After a period of time the group left the park. Shortly after leaving the park Weasel and Edward Riley left the group and proceeded along Russell Street to return to the Baynes Street Hostel whilst the balance of the group travelled down Edmondstone Street with a view of going to the Oxford Street Hostel. This group was followed by Damrow and Harris as they proceeded down Edmondstone Street, across Melbourne Street to a nearby area known as SEQEB Park on the corner of Boundary and Brereton Streets, West End. Before the group reached the location Harris made a number of calls on the police radio seeking assistance, firstly from a Dutton Park car and thereafter from any car in the vicinity.

A Dutton Park Crime Squad vehicle containing Acting Sergeant Symes and Senior Constable Bishop responded to the general call for assistance.

The group entered SEQEB Park and Damrow and Harris waited at or near a stop sign near the junction of Boundary and Edmondstone Streets. As soon as Symes and Bishop arrived they drove into Brereton Street where both vehicles stopped near SEQEB Park.

The Woman stops abruptly, looks as if she is about to speak out, then resumes reading.

The group dispersed. Vocke ran but was intercepted and arrested by Symes. In the course of the arrest Vocke went to the ground. Bishop and Harris then pursued members of the group towards the hostel leaving

Symes and Damrow with Vocke. Shortly after the arrest of Vocke another Dutton Park vehicle containing Sergeant Crowley and Constable Crozier arrived at the scene. Crowley handcuffed Vocke's hands behind his back. Crowley and Symes then left Damrow and Crozier with Vocke and drove down to the Oxford Street Hostel.

At the hostel there was a struggle between police and a group of youths. After remaining on the ground for some time with Damrow and Crozier, Vocke was then driven to the hostel.

The Woman finally breaks out.

People called him Boonie! He was known as Boonie ...

She stops herself and continues to read tonelessly.

By this time other police had arrived at the scene including Constable Caris, Constable Leyendeckers, Sergeant Whittaker and Senior Constable Parker.

After the incident at the hostel, police patrolled the area for at least 17 minutes looking for other alleged offenders. Two vehicles then travelled to the Brisbane City Watchhouse.

*In this section the Woman breaks away from the written word.
This requires the actor to improvise the text in her own words.*

On Vocke's arrival at the Watchhouse his condition aroused immediate concern. When they looked closer they saw that he wasn't breathing, he didn't have any pulse. The people at the Watchhouse didn't know what to do so they called the ambulance. The ambulance got there and they had to pump needles into him, they were pounding his chest, giving mouth-to-mouth, whilst the others stood back and watched. They took him to the Royal Brisbane Hospital, pounding and pushing his limp body.

The Woman returns to the written word.

The resuscitation attempts were unsuccessful and at 7.13 pm he was pronounced dead.

15 March

The Woman stands strong. Her body rocks with the rising pace of the march.

The call went out. Faxes. Mobile phones. Leaflets. Word of mouth. Photocopiers working overtime. Flash ... wait a minute, wait a minute, wait a minute ...

The news was out. Musgrave Park 9 am. A peaceful march, a silent march.

Thousands ... stretched out.

We're not fighting, we're grieving.

I'm in a crowd. I'm in a crowd of people all walking. I'm in a crowd of people all walking along in silence. I'm in a crowd of people all walking along in silence, my Dad, my brothers and sisters and my Nana. No one speaks, no one yells, everyone just walks together.

If you feel like fighting, if you feel like yelling, grab it in your hand and show your grief, lift it up and show the world.

I'm walking along and all I can hear is the shuffle of shoes, everyone is too busy thinking about what it means to be here.

Four helicopters circle the crowd.

Declaiming News headlines.

'Defiant Aboriginal March'
'Aboriginal March, Traffic Stopper'

No one said that about the fucken Santa Parade the week before!

Hey! We going to be on TV.

Frightened

Hey, we're going to be on TV.
Smile for the police camera.

We come from a long tradition of storytelling. If this the only way we can get our story told ...

This huge gathering stops outside the police Watchhouse in Herschel Street. And we sit ... quiet ... Roma Street crowd gather to watch. The family sing, dance and smoke out the spirit and the dancers play their clapsticks. The rhythm engulfs the crowd, the beat echoes round the buildings like if at last the song was coming up from ground to swallow everything in revenge. The clapsticks ring out alone at first, I'm in the crowd and we all clap as we rise, as we walk.

6,000 people in rhythm pounding at the road but we're not yelling, we're not fighting. We're grieving.

A whistle rings out. The high pitched ones you can only do if you hold your lips really tight. The clapsticks, the singing, the clapping, the pounding of our feet and the piercing ring of whistles.

The Woman stands, her arms raised defiantly.

Don't tell me we're not fighting! Don't tell me we don't fight most of our lives.

16 Bargaining

The sound of hammering. The Woman slams a nail through two pieces of wood. She stands and carries the wooden cross over to the grave. As she drives it into the red earth, the words 'FOR SALE' are revealed.

What is it worth?



17 Home Story

The Woman takes several handfuls of red earth from the grave, making a large pile on the floor.

Now I want to tell you a story. I'll tell you how it was told to me. Now it's very complex, I get it wrong sometimes, I'm no expert but I'll try to explain it the best way I can, so you'll have stay with me. It's all got to do with family culture and language and stuff. Are you with me?

This pile here is the land, the source, the spirit, the core of everything. Are you with me on that?

The Woman makes a circle around the pile.

And this one here is about culture, family, song, tradition, dance. Have you got that?

Then came the children. Every one has their place. Now this is where it gets complicated so you'll have to stay with me.

The Woman makes eight smaller piles around the larger pile within the circle.

You always have to marry within your own skin.

If I was part of this pile here, that would mean this pile would be my mother ... because you always follow the line of the woman. And this pile could be my father ... or this one. Which makes this one and this one here my grandparents and cousins.

Now if I was to marry, I couldn't marry from the same pile because they would be my brothers and sisters. But I could marry this pile here because they're my cousins, which makes this pile my children, because you always follow the line of the woman. Are you with me?

I'll explain that again.

This mob and this mob can marry because they're grandparents and cousins. You can't marry this mob because they're your brothers and sisters and you can't marry this mob or this mob because they're your children. Cause you always follow the line of the woman.



You can't marry this one, this one or this one because that's like marrying your father.

The only ones I could marry are ... wait a minute. This mob and this mob can marry because they're grandparents and cousins. You can't marry this mob because they're your brothers and sisters and you can't marry this mob or this mob because they're your children. Cause you always follow the line of the woman. You can't marry this one, this one or this one because that's like marrying your father. The only ones I could marry are this mob or this mob. Are you with me?

The Woman gathers up the smaller piles and relocates them on the white fringing that defines the black performing area.

Now imagine when the children are taken away from this. Are you with me?

The Woman flays her arm through the remaining large pile and circle, destroying it.

18 Story of a Brother

The sound of laughter. The Woman comes forward to tell her story.

I have a brother. He's 21 years old. This one night he was walking down the Mall with two of his mates. Pissed as. They were walking along and you know in the mall, all those little cameras you see with the big black bug eyes, they were watching them. True.

They wanted one of my brother's friends — I don't know why — in connection to some thing or to question him because some other black kid had done something wrong — you know how we all look alike — and so they came down to get him. My brother said, "You can't take him away, you got no right." They basically said they did have the right and they grabbed my brother's friend.

Now this fella, my brother, he's not the smartest of men and when he's on the charge ...

The Woman demonstrates.

... he can be a little clumsy.

He thought, "This fella's done nothing wrong." So with his sense of justice and him sticking up for his Bungies, he pushed the police officer and the police officer pushed back, so he pushed again. "I said leave him alone". Another police officer fairly lifted him onto the ground, his arm up his back, him kicking and swearing, handcuffs, back of the car, they charged him. No good that fella. Shame.

They charged him with (as a magistrate) "Assault or obstructing the course of justice" ... or something. He was fined \$1000 and put on a 2 month probation, it wasn't that serious. But when Dad went to pick him up from the Watchhouse in the middle of the night the shame was palpable.

Because of the shame my brother just budgalled around the house, chucked in his job, couldn't get the dole, couldn't pay his fine, had to front court, when the dole did come in, he was too slack with his diary, lost it. Borrowed money from Mum and Dad which made him even more dependent and embarrassed. To cope, he went out all night with his mates got pissed, broke his probation, got another fine. Third strike.

This is how it starts, the cycle. This cycle.

I know it happens ... I know it can happen to anyone. But in our family to be shamed out like that eats your spirit, your life. We've seen it before, we've seen it too many times, cousins going in and then you get that call.

My brother fronts court in 2 weeks. And the family's still wondering what's gonna happen.

19 Gallery of Sorrow

A collection of images appears, depicting the phases of Aboriginal History — Dreaming, Invasion, Genocide, Protection, Assimilation, Self-determination and Reconciliation.



20 Suitcase Opening

The Woman paints herself as if preparing for war. Though her movements are restricted her voice assails the audience with a sense of all-encompassing sorrow. She takes the suitcase, opens it, throwing the red earth and family photos it contains all over the floor. The Woman grieves over the photographs.

The Woman leaves. Images of landscape interweave with family portraits creating a tapestry of Land and People.

Music fills the space. There is a feeling of catharsis and release.



21 Wreck / con / silly / nation Poem

The Woman returns to the performing area cleansed, fresh. Written in childlike script the words

'Wreck', 'Con', 'Silly', 'Nation'

are projected.

The boats are ready for departure, if you don't want to stay.

A **Wreck** on arrival,
A changing flag,
A **Con**,
A **Silly** pride for sale,
My **Nation** knows my identity,
A sun,
A land,
A people, travelling.

What a mess.

22 Everything Has Its Time

The Woman addresses the audience. The space is full of words.

Wreck, Con, Silly, Nation.

Some people write it like this.

Wreck, Con, Silly, Nation.

What's the use in having a word if we don't think and talk about it. In the end it isn't something you read or write that changes your life. It's something you do.

The Woman retrieves the suitcase. The word RECONCILIATION is packed into it. The Woman Jocks the suitcase.

Everything has its time ... Everything has its time ...

23 Plea

The Woman carries the suitcase with her as she approaches the audience.

You know there's this grieving,

Grieving for our Land, our families.

Our cultures.

But we have been taught to cry quietly.

Where only our eyes betray us with tears.

But now, we can no longer wait,

I am scared my heart is hardening.

I am so full and know my capacity for grief.

I fear I can no longer grieve.

What can I do ?

These are my stories.

These are my people's stories.

They need to be told.

The Woman places the Suitcase down at the feet of the audience.

24 Walking Across Bridges

When we get to North Sydney station it hits me. The train stops and the doors open and everyone is moving ... you get onto the platform and you realise it's packed, slowly moving up the stairs and through the turnstiles ... and more trains coming ... and I'm on my phone to my friends saying they got to get down here ... something's going off. It's takes us 40 minutes to get to the street ... I mean they've stopped taking the tickets ... they've turned off the gate machines and just letting people through.

And as we walk down that hill and you see the bridge and suddenly ... you can see how ... many people there are ... walking across the bridge ... and I get that tingle. I get that tingle now just talking about it.

(Pause)

I mean there's so many people.

(Pause)

I'm walking across the bridge and if you look from a distance it's like a colourful snake, (pause) like a rainbow serpent.

(Pause)

In the middle of the bridge I stop and there's an old Aunty. She's staring up through the bridge and she's crying, not the kind of crying you do at funerals this is different. I look up and I can see the flag flying on the bridge ... the red, black and yellow.

(Pause)

They've written sorry ...

(Pause)

... they've written sorry across the sky.

(Pause)

They said over 1/4 of a million people walked that day, and then more in Melbourne, Brisbane, Adelaide ... all around the country. Like a song it caught on ... walking across bridges.

Who would have thought, eh?

I guess we can't go back now.



SONG TRANSLATIONS

The language used in composing the songs for **THE 7 STAGES OF GRIEVING** is based on the Kamilaroi language.

Material for the songs was researched from FAIRA (Foundation for Aboriginal and Islander Research Action) from a publication entitled *Kamilaroi Dippil and Turrubul languages spoken by Australian Aborigines* by Rev. William Ridley published in 1866 by the NSW Government Printer.

The Kamilaroi language is spoken or understood by all the tribes living in the country intersected by the tributaries of the Darling River.

Good Clean Smoke

Yugila Yugila Munangi	Weep my heavy heart
Bullar Du	Clean Smoke
Marraba Bullar Du	Good Clean Smoke

Black Skin Girl

Bului yuli mie	Black Skin Girl
Naia gigi warunguldul	I will be strong always

GLOSSARY

boodgi	a fart
budgualled	to be slack or silly
bungies	your mates
deadly	to describe something as excellent
gamin	not true
gubberment	another pronunciation of government
Murri	an Aboriginal person from parts of Queensland
Musgrave Park	traditional meeting place for the Brisbane community
nunna	Kamilaroi term for 'me'
reconciliation	what does it really mean?
SEQEB	South East Queensland Electricity Board
sisgirl	girl friend, cousin or relative
sousou	a woman's breast